

## Quiet Zones - Train Noise

Last Updated Tuesday, 02 October 2007

The following is information regarding train noise at railroad crossings and what can be and is being done to help alleviate current and future noise issues.

### Frequently Asked Questions

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- Who controls the railroad crossings in the Boulder area?
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- Why has train noise increased in recent years?
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### Who owns the railroad tracks in Boulder?

- Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway owns and operates all railroad tracks in the city of Boulder.

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### Who controls the railroad crossings in the Boulder area?

- There are ten crossings in the immediate vicinity of Boulder. Five are on roads controlled by the city and five are on county-controlled roads. Therefore, it is likely that the city and county would need to work together to establish quiet zones in Boulder, as federal rules stipulate that the agency that controls the road at the crossing must apply for Quiet Zone status.

Who regulates the sounding of train horns at railroad crossings?

- The sounding of train horns at crossings is regulated by federal rules from the Federal Railway Authority (FRA).

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Why has train noise increased in recent years?

- The apparent recent increase in train noise, despite the number of trains passing through our community remaining fairly stable (about seven per day), may be due to federal rules governing the blowing of horns at crossings adopted in 2005 and a recent push for an increased adherence to those rules by BNSF

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What can legally be done to decrease train noise at crossings?

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The same 2005 FRA rules that governed the blowing of horns also established a process by which local governments can establish "quiet zones," which remove the requirement for train operators to routinely sound their horn at all crossings. Information on the use of locomotive horns at Highway-Rail Grade Crossings can be found on the FRA Web site.

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How are quiet zones established?

- Establishing a quiet zone is not an easy task. It usually requires significant improvements to crossings, such as; enhanced warning circuitry, special types of gates, extended medians and other "supplemental safety measures.

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What is the cost of establishing a quiet zone?

- The city of Denver is exploring the costs of implementing a quiet zone at one of their crossings. They estimate that it will cost them \$300,000 to set one up at this location. Others have put the cost of establishing a quiet zone at between \$250,000 and \$500,000 per crossing if significant infrastructure improvements are required, as will be likely at many of Boulder's crossings.

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What are RTD and the city of Boulder doing to help establish quiet zones?

- RTD is currently conducting a planning process for the FasTracks northwest rail corridor. Noise impacts and the mitigation of those impacts is one aspect of the study. RTD has stated that they will upgrade crossings to "quiet zone standards" but the details have not been resolved. Any improvements not funded by RTD will likely be the responsibility of local governments, as will the actual application for quiet zone status. Public input is an important part of the RTD planning process. Visit the RTD-FasTracks Web site for more information.

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In the case of an accident at a railroad crossing, who is liable?

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When a quiet zone is established, liability for an accident in the quiet zone is shifted from the railroad owner or transit operator to the local government. The City Attorney's Office and Risk Management team are exploring this aspect. Since quiet zones are relatively new, little case law has been established on this issue.

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Do quiet zones increase the likelihood of accidents at railroad crossings?

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FRA and railroad documentation indicate that quiet zones may increase the likelihood of accidents at a crossing.

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Are quiet zones really quiet?

- Experts estimate that 90% of train noise comes from blowing the horns, so quiet zones can make a significant difference. Other noise comes from the engines and from train wheels, particularly on curved sections of track. A variety of infrastructure improvements can be used at quiet zones. Some communities have chosen to replace the train-mounted horns with horns mounted on the poles at the crossings. The pole-mounted horns are more directional (aimed down at the railway), which can reduce the number of homes and businesses impacted by the noise. Whether or not these pole-mounted horns are appropriate for some Boulder crossings is being explored by staff.

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What is the city currently doing in regards to quiet zones?

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City staff hopes to take an initial overview of estimated costs and other considerations to city council in late 2007 with a request for direction on whether we should further explore quiet zones. The costs are likely to be significant and the liability and safety issues should not be ignored.

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